Analogue Solutions Oberkorn 3 | £469

With 'do-it-all' software packages ruling the roost, is there room for analogue sequencing? *Jono Buchanan* goes back in time with the Oberkorn 3…

WHAT IS IT?

An analogue CV and gate sequencer for producing 16-note sequences without the need for MIDI

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

1 Playable

2 Surprisingly intuitive

3 Nothing sounds quite like an analogue sequencer

SPECS

Three rows of 16 CV dials
One row of gate dials with two outputs
MIDI Out/Thru
Internal/External Clock
Tempo Control
Legato Mode
Three transpose inputs

Before MIDI, communication between sequencers, synthesizers and drum machines was handled by CV and gate controls. Back in the olden days when synths were controlled by voltage, their pitch was determined either by a keyboard press or from an external voltage controller, such as a sequencer.

Then MIDI came along, offering a wider range of controllable parameters and, save for a hard core of devotees, CV and gate interfacing was lost.

More recently, many soft synths have started featuring built in step-sequencers and arpeggiators, which aim to recapture the spirit (and fun) of analogue sequencing.

Blue lights

Such enthusiasm has led to a mini-revival of analogue sequencers. Last year, I had a look at Genocq's extraordinary Octopus, which allowed for grid-based sequencing via a MIDI interface. In front of me is the Oberkorn 3, which takes retro sequencing a step further, by relying on CV and gate as its control sources.

As long as you have a CV-ready synthesizer or drum machine, getting started with the Oberkorn 3 is relatively painless. To get going, you need to connect separate CV and gate cables from the sequencer to your instrument, press the reset button to initialise a new sequence and flick the Run/Stop switch into run mode.

Initially, it's best to keep the clock source on Internal, which means that the sequencer runs to its own tempo. This can be clocked to external signals too, including MIDI.

Once connections are made, the fun starts with twiddling the voltage controls for each step. Each of these equals a different pitch, so you can create something musical or utterly bonkers in no time.

As voltage can be used to control filters as well as oscillators, it's possible to vary tone for each step too, and doing so immediately produces some of the bubbly analogue phrases of yesteryear.

Each step has an accompanying blue LED, so it's easy to keep track of your sequence's progress and the playback order of steps can be varied as well, to prevent a sequence becoming too predictable.

In fact, three separate CV sources can be controlled at each step and the top three rows of dials represent three separate banks of CV control, while the bottom row concerns itself with gate messages. These can feed either or both X and Y outputs, so there's ample control available, and you switch the master gate control to Legato mode if you want a less spiky sequence.
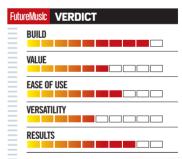
Conclusion

The Oberkorn 3 is a great sequencer. It does its job wonderfully well and is so much fun to play with that, should one cross your path, I suspect you'll lose hours in its company.

But then how likely is it that you'll come across one? I suspect the vast majority of you reading this probably won't have a spare £470 for a product like this, not because it's bad but because it's much less instantly compatible with your other studio gear.

Remember, to get the best use from one of these, you'll also need an instrument with CV and gate inputs, or at least a CV/MIDI converter, which will only inflate the cost.

That said, music making should be about originality and the ability to offer something innovative. If this sounds like you, you'd do well to have a good look at this box. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD

VALUE

EASE OF USE

VERSATILITY

RESULTS

This is great fun and certainly very capable, but it's probably a bit too niche for most of us…